



"Suddenly the shoe fell from his hands, and he looked up at the young woman with a determined, frightened expression. 'I can say it—and I will say it,' he stammered out. 'I love you, Louise.'"

Illustrations by
George E. Wolfe

The Man in the Stone House

By FREEMAN TILDEN

"WHAT you need, Mrs. Tibb," said Dr. Melville, looking with professional severity at the wife of the Popular Cash Grocer of Buxton, Vermont, "is to get out of this place. Go down South. Go out West. Go to Porto Rico. Travel around. Go where you can stay outdoors. Stop worrying. That's all you need."

Jennie Tibb sat up indignantly.

"I s'pose you'll be telling me I'm playing sick next," she replied, distributing the asperity equally between the young doctor and Joel Tibb, her husband.

"Do you know, Jen," said Mr. Tibb assuagingly, "I believe the doc is right. Perhaps a trip would be the very thing." The idea of travel rather appealed to Joel.

"And who," asked Mrs. Tibb, "will take care of my hens?" Mrs. Tibb "fancied" white Leghorns.

"And who," repeated Dr. Melville, with a faintly apparent smile playing about his mouth, "will take care of your hens if you stay here and don't get any better?"

That argument was a clincher. Jennie Tibb puckered up her forehead searching for the answer, but she was fairly caught.

The Tibbs left Buxton on the sixteenth of January.

MR. and Mrs. Joel Tibb had been in Empire City about three quarters of an hour, and in the Metropolitan Hotel about half an hour, when a knock came at the door of their room, and it was announced that a young man waited below

for an opportunity to speak to Mr. Tibb upon an important matter.

Joel Tibb was considerably surprised. The most important business he had done, in the past week, was to disburse money. He had had no idea that traveling was so expensive. Every time the Tibb trunk was moved, it involved Mr. Tibb in a swamp of complications, out of which he had to force his way with his pocket-book in his hand. In Buxton, Joel's home town, one could move one's entire household effects for about a dollar. But on this memorable journey Mr. Tibb discovered that it costs about as much for a trunk to travel as it does for a man. When he left home, the Popular Cash Grocer of Buxton had taken with him what he considered to be "about enough" money. He had already written home for more funds.

Mr. Tibb put on a clean collar and went downstairs. A young man with a wide-brimmed hat and an eager eye met him with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Tibb of Buxton?" he inquired. "Happy to meet you. My name is Calkins. What do you think of Empire City? The population is increasing at the rate of 400 per cent. a year, Mr. Tibb. I can show you the figures. What do you think of the climate? We call it the garden spot of California. This is really the poorest time of year to see it. In the month of May it's a Paradise. There were only seven days last year when the

sun didn't shine; and last year was the worst year we ever had. If you stay here two weeks you'll never go back to New England. Have you noticed the quality of the air?"

THE young man with the eager eye finally released Mr. Tibb's hand, and the Popular Cash Grocer put it in his pocket for protection. He stammered: "Why, we've just arrived. I can't say—"

"Of course not. But you'll find that I'm telling the truth about our beautiful city. In fact, Mr. Tibb, my policy is to understate the facts rather than to overstate them. A good many people make a big mistake on that point. You see, Mr. Tibb, I run the local newspaper here. I like to get the opinions of newcomers about Empire City. We had a man from Bardolph, Vermont,—or maybe it was Michigan; I know it was Bardolph,—come here last week. He spent just three hours riding around, and then sent home for his furniture. Have you noticed the peculiar dryness of the air?"

"I haven't noticed anything yet," said Mr. Tibb. "We just arrived not more than an hour ago, and—"

"House lots that used to sell for a few dollars an acre are practically worth their weight in gold now," continued the young man. "And yet, even at the present price, I wish you could tell me of a better investment, Mr. Tibb. But I won't bother you any more just now. I realize

you're tired from traveling. Here's my card; I do a little in the real estate line, on the side. Come and see me this afternoon, and I'll drive you about the city in my auto. And I'm much obliged for the interview you've given me. We always like to get the opinions of strangers."

Mr. Tibb, who was not aware of having uttered any opinions whatever, grinned cordially and watched the young man with the wide-brimmed hat speeding out the front door.

"Who was it, Joel?" asked Mrs. Tibb, when her husband returned to the room.

"A pleasant young fellow called to tell me that the population of this place is increasing at the rate of—I've forgotten just the per cent., but it's enormous. He's an editor, and he's going to write us up in his paper, Jennie. We'll send a copy home to the *Banner*."

"But what was the important business, Joel?"

"Well, I don't know, unless that was it. He did say something about the place being called the 'garden spot,' or something like that, and called my attention to the dryness of the air. Maybe he got so interested he forgot what he really wanted to say. He was as quick as a cat. You ought to have seen him shoot out the door. I was just going to tell him—"

ANOTHER knock at the door. A card announced the presence of another gentleman downstairs who wished to speak briefly with Mr. Tibb of Buxton.

The second visitor was a big, ruddy-